

## CLAIMS

### WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An analytical system for generating and accessing arguments, wherein each argument has an associated conclusion as to whether a particular situation will likely have a negative or positive result, the analytical system comprising:

a database for storing a plurality of templates that each include a plurality of questions which may be answered to generate a particular argument having an associated conclusion regarding a particular situation that is based on answers to its associated template questions; and

- an argument server for selecting one of the templates which is most relevant to a particular situation and for receiving input to one or more of the selected template's questions to thereby generate a new argument having an associated conclusion based on such answers, the associated conclusion indicating whether the particular situation will likely have a positive or negative result.

2. An analytical system as recited in claim 1, wherein the argument server is further configured to associate supporting evidence with each answer to each template question.

3. An analytical system as recited in claim 1, wherein each template's questions are formed in a hierarchical structure, wherein a parent question that has a plurality of children questions may be automatically answered by answering the parent's children questions.

4. An analytical system as recited in claim 1, wherein the argument server is further configured to associate a rationale with each answer to each template question.

5. An analytical system as recited in claim 1, wherein input to one or more of the selected template's questions may be received from a plurality of users over a computer network.

6. An analytical system as recited in claim 5, wherein the argument server is further configured to allow one or more of the users to associate comments to at least a portion of the new argument.

10 7. An analytical system as recited in claim 6, wherein the comments are only accessible by one or more specified users.

8. An analytical system as recited in claim 1, wherein each template question is a multiple choice question.

9. An analytical system as recited in claim 8, wherein each multiple choice question asks to what degree of likelihood will a particular factor related to the particular situation have a positive or negative result.

10. An analytical system as recited in claim 9, wherein each multiple choice question has a categorical scale of likelihood represented by a set of answers that partition the likelihood scale.

20 11. An analytical system as recited in claim 9, wherein each template's questions are formed in a hierarchical structure, wherein the argument server is

further configured to automatically answer a parent question having a plurality of children questions based on answers to the parent's children questions.

12. An analytical system as recited in claim 11, wherein the argument server is further configured to allow more than one answer for each question.

5 13. An analytical system as recited in claim 11, wherein the parent question is automatically answered using an answering technique selected by a user.

14. An analytical system as recited in claim 13, wherein the answering technique may be selected from a group consisting of a maximization technique, an averaging technique, and a minimization technique.

10 15. An analytical system as recited in claim 11, wherein each answer within the hierarchical structure has a color selected from a subset of colors, each color representing a different answer so that the hierarchical structure's colors convey a line of reasoning.

16. An analytical system as recited in claim 11, wherein one or more  
15 template questions is associated with a second hierarchical structure of questions and the first and second hierarchical structures together form a set of cascaded arguments.

17. An analytical system as recited in claim 1, wherein one or more template questions have an associated discovery tool that facilitates answering of such associated template question.

20 18. An analytical system as recited in claim 1, wherein each template is associated with a situation descriptors and the argument server selects one of the

templates which is most relevant to a particular situation by comparing a current situation to the situation descriptors associated with the templates to thereby find the most relevant templates having the most closely matching situation descriptors.

19. An analytical system as recited in claim 1, wherein the argument server  
5 is further configured to allow creation of a new template, wherein the new template is created by an expert.

20. A method for accessing or generating an argument having a conclusion for a particular situation, the method comprising:

searching a plurality of templates for a relevant template most related to a  
10 particular situation, wherein each template includes a plurality of questions; and

answering one or more questions of the relevant template to form a new argument having a conclusion based on the one or more answers.

21. A method as recited in claim 20, further comprising associating supporting evidence to each answered template question.

15 22. A method as recited in claim 21, further comprising associating a rationale to each answered template question.

23. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein each template's questions are formed in a hierarchical structure, wherein a parent question that has a plurality of children questions may be automatically answered by answering the parent's children  
20 questions.

24. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein input to one or more of the selected template's questions may be received from a plurality of users over a computer network.

25. A method as recited in claim 24, the method further comprising  
5 allowing one or more of the users to associate comments to at least a portion of the new argument.

26. A method as recited in claim 25, wherein the comments are only accessible by one or more specified users.

27. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein each template question is a  
10 multiple choice question.

28. A method as recited in claim 27, wherein each multiple choice question asks to what degree of likelihood will a particular factor related to the particular situation have a positive or negative result.

29. A method as recited in claim 28, wherein each multiple choice  
15 question has a categorical scale of likelihood represented by a set of answers that partition the likelihood scale.

30. A method as recited in claim 28, wherein each template's questions are formed in a hierarchical structure, the method further comprising automatically answering a parent question having a plurality of children questions based on answers  
20 to the parent's children questions.

31. A method as recited in claim 30, the method further comprising providing more than one answer for at least one question.

32. A method as recited in claim 30, wherein the parent question is automatically answered using an answering technique selected by a user.

5 33. A method as recited in claim 32, wherein the answering technique may be selected from a group consisting of a maximization technique, an averaging technique, and a minimization technique.

34. A method as recited in claim 30, wherein each answer within the hierarchical structure has a color selected from a subset of colors, each color  
10 representing a different answer so that the hierarchical structure's colors convey a line of reasoning.

35. A method as recited in claim 30, wherein one or more template questions is associated with a second hierarchical structure of questions and the first and second hierarchical structures together form a set of cascaded arguments.

15 36. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein one or more template questions have an associated discovery tool that facilitates answering of such associated template question.

37. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein each template is associated with a situation descriptors, the method further comprising selecting one of the  
20 templates which is most relevant to a particular situation by comparing a current situation to the situation descriptors associated with the templates to thereby find the most relevant templates having the most closely matching situation descriptors.

38. A method as recited in claim 20, the method further comprising creating a new template, wherein the new template is created by an expert.

39. A computer readable medium containing program instructions for accessing or generating an argument having a conclusion for a particular situation, the  
5 computer readable medium comprising:

computer code for searching a plurality of templates for a relevant template most related to a particular situation, wherein each template includes a plurality of questions;

computer code for answering one or more questions of the relevant template to  
10 form a new argument having a conclusion based on the one or more answers;

a computer readable medium that stores the computer codes.

40. A computer system operable to access or generate an argument having a conclusion for a particular situation, the computer system comprising:

one or more processors;

15 one or more memory, wherein at least one of the processors and memory are adapted to:

search a plurality of templates for a relevant template most related to a particular situation, wherein each template includes a plurality of questions; and

answer one or more questions of the relevant template to form a new argument  
20 having a conclusion based on the one or more answers.